



*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 7-18-08*****

From the Office of the Director of Health

Breastfeeding Gives Infants Best Start in Life

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department's WIC office encourages Greene County mothers to give their infants the best start in life by breastfeeding.

"Health experts agree that breastfeeding promotes a baby's good health from birth," says breastfeeding peer counselor Kelly Evans. "Breastmilk contains more than 100,000 nutrients and antibodies which give an infant a stronger immune system, better brain development and a healthier life."

Mothers also benefit from breastfeeding, adds Evans. It reduces post partum depression, helps with weight loss, boosts the immune system and offers increased protection against breast and ovarian cancer.

In the last several months, the Greene County breastfeeding initiation rate has soared to 65%, exceeding the state level of 53%. Staff attribute the rate climb to a successful peer counselor program, designed to support breastfeeding mothers.

"Breastfeeding is one of the most important decisions a new mother can make to benefit the health of her child," adds Evans. "Mothers often face challenges like misinformation, breastfeeding while working outside the home, lack of support from family and friends and overcoming her own doubts about succeeding. Our counselors spend one-on-one time with moms to help them have a successful breastfeeding experience."

This year the WIC program will also offer a breastfeeding station at the Ozark Empire Fair in observance of Breastfeeding Awareness Month in Missouri and World Breastfeeding Week (August 1 – 7). Mothers are encouraged to stop by the WIC booth, or alternative breastfeeding stations to feed their babies in a private, comfortable, air-conditioned setting.

The WIC office offers breastfeeding support daily at no cost to all Greene County mothers, including WIC clients. Classes are offered, such as "How to Breastfeed" and "What to Expect the First Two Weeks". Peer counselors assist mothers with techniques, individual needs and concerns. Also, private breastfeeding stations are available for use at WIC's Lactation Center, located at 290 E Central. The Center is open Monday through Thursday 7:30 am to 7:00 pm, and Friday 7:30 am to 5:00 pm.

For more information, call the health department's WIC office at (417) 864-1324 or (417) 864-1079.

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